
Christina Welch

FOR PRAYERS AND PEDAGOGY: CONTEXTUALIZING ENGLISH CARVED CADAVER MONUMENTS OF THE LATE- MEDIEVAL SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ELITE

Dr Christina Welch is a senior lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Winchester. She leads a Masters Degree in Death, Religion and Culture and runs a series of day conferences on this topic. Much of her research centres around religion and visual culture.

University of Winchester
Department of Theology and Religious
Studies
Winchester
SO22 4NR
UK

christina.welch@winchester.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This short article contextualizes a subset of Northern European cadaver monuments of the late-Medieval/early-Modern era, known as *transi* imagery. It explores 37 English carved cadaver monuments (ECCMs) dating from between c. 1425 to 1558. By examining vernacular theology, perceptions of purgatory, and understandings of the body post-mortem, it supports current scholarly writing that these ECCMs were pedagogical in nature, prompting prayers from the living to comfort the deceased in purgatory. However, it controversially argues that ECCMs additionally provided a visual reminder to the living that purgatorial suffering was not just spiritual, but also physical during the wet stage of death (the period before the corpse became skeletal). Further, by drawing on fieldwork, this article provides the first comprehensive guide to the carved cadaver monuments that can be found in England.

Keywords: death; England; post-mortem sentience; purgatory; *transi* tombs.

Introduction

In *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1973), art historian Kathleen Cohen explores the Northern European phenomena for cadaver monuments. As a form of memorialization, *transi*¹ tombs, she argues, were popular in Northern Europe between 1391 and 1689, where they were prevalent amongst the high clergy and land-owning social elite. Of the 200 *transis* that Cohen lists, a list that art historian Sophie Oosterwijk notes is “far from complete” (2005: 62), 61 are located in France (1391–1613), 20 in the Lowlands (1387–1645), one in Switzerland (late 1390s), 36 in Germany (1456–1594) and 82 in England (1424–1689, including 18 *transi* brasses 1431–1595). Cohen describes a *transi* as:

a figure completely swathed in a shroud, as an emaciated corpse with protruding intestines, as a shrived body with skin drawn taut across its bony frame, and as a decaying corpse covered by snakes and frogs. (1973: 2)

In this inter-disciplinary article I examine, complicate, and contextualize a number of the English *transis*, a subset that I have termed English carved cadaver monuments (ECCMs). There are 37 such monuments and these date from c. 1425 to 1558, and are fully three-dimensional,² thus do not include the English *transi* brasses. By drawing on the work of notable art, medical and church historians, as well as utilizing Hertz’s anthological distinction between the wet (corpse) and dry (skeletal) stages of death, I seek to place the ECCMs in their contemporary socio-cultural and religious context by exploring vernacular theology especially in relation to the afterlife, and the notion of post-mortem sentience; the idea that a cadaver was perceived as in some way still sentient or conscious. Additionally, this article will also provide the first comprehensive guide to ECCMs.

It is important to note that all ECCMs would have been of specific members of the religious and social elite (the land-owning classes) due to the high cost of their production, although many are now anonymous, or have speculative attribution. Further, not all contain bodily remains and as such cannot be accurately classed as tombs, although all operated as memorials. As such, I have deliberately termed this subset of *transis* as English Carved Cadaver Monuments (ECCMs) to differentiate them from other forms of *transi*, such as the European cadaver monuments, clothed *gisant* (recumbent) effigies, and cadaver brasses.

1. From the French meaning “passed over.”

2. Some European *transis* are sculptured in relief; that is, a body that projects from a two-dimensional background.

History of ECCMs

Transi tombs as Cohen terms them, originated in late fourteenth-century France, with the first English monument, that of Archbishop Henry Chichele (c. 1364–1443) constructed around 1425 in Canterbury Cathedral, Kent. Chichele's monument, both commissioned and built during his lifetime, is a tiered monument with a *giant* image of Chichele as he was in life, wearing his highly coloured clerical clothing and bearing signs of rank and office, above an image of his naked emaciated corpse. Stripped of all adornments except a burial shroud and with a hand strategically placed across his groin to preserve his modesty, the lower monument was self-commissioned to serve as a visual reminder to all who gazed upon it, that no matter what your age or status, that corpse would one day be you; a clear link to purgatory, with its associated requirements to pray for the dead, and to lead a virtuous life regardless of your social status.

More evidence for the pedagogical aspect to ECCMs can be gleaned from the Latin inscription originally on Archbishop Richard Fleming's tiered cadaver monument (c. 1386–1431) in Lincoln cathedral, Lincolnshire. Now missing, it read (in part):

Reader, whoever comes this way, read for a while. Stand, seeing in me, who is eaten by worms, what you will be... All things are put to flight by cruel death, like shadows... Brief life is vain, such glory has this end. (Cohen, 1973: 18)

These words paint a grisly picture, and are redolent of both Cohen's decaying corpse style of *transi*, and church historian Eamon Duffy's description of English cadaver monuments. Duffy asserts that this form of mortality memorial portrays:

the deceased as a decaying corpse, its skin stretched tight over grinning teeth, starting bones and empty eye sockets, the stomach bursting open to reveal a seething horror of worms and unclean creatures. (1992: 306)

Yet having conducted fieldwork to examine in detail all the known ECCMs, it is clear that descriptions of them as "emaciated corpses with protruding intestines" (Cohen, 1973: 2), or as "rotting corpses covered with creepy-crawlies" (Duffy, 1992: 306), is not correct. Apart from one carved wooden cadaver which may possibly depict intestines (although carved incorrectly as appearing vertically in the chest cavity as opposed to horizontally), and the remains of one stone carved monument possibly showing a heart inside an open chest cavity, no ECCM indicate signs of decomposition. Indeed, Cohen's description of a shrivelled body is in fact the most accurate depiction of ECCMs, and in actuality she notes that the emaciated corpse style of *transi* was the most prevalent in England (1973: 2); my own fieldwork supports this.



Figure 1. *Detail – Rockley* © Christina Welch 2011.

From my fieldwork it is evident that the typical ECCM is of an emaciated individual, naked apart from a burial shroud, and protecting their modesty with a carefully placed hand across the genital area; although there are one or two variations on these themes. Additionally, they are generally carved with good anatomical accuracy (although this does vary), even detailing bellybuttons and nipples. All ECCMs have been carved showing their eyes open, or half-open, and as such are not imaged sleeping. Thus, the Duffy's assertion that ECCMs were originally carved to depict a putrefying body is simply inaccurate, and appears based on Cohen's descriptions of European *transis* rather than on first-hand knowledge; although the wooden carved cadaver of Sir Roger Rockley (d. 1524), at St Mary's Church, Worsborough, South Yorkshire, could be perceived as coming the closest to Duffy's description (Fig. 1). Although it is clearly not a putrefying corpse, it is quite grisly with "its skin stretched tight over grinning teeth." In actuality this carved cadaver appears in part to resemble a flayed corpse, with muscle definition on the neck, arms and legs, and an open chest cavity with ribs showing and presumably what are meant to be internal organs (although incorrectly positioned);³

3. Inaccurate internal anatomical detail is not unsurprising as during this period in England, anatomization was relatively rare (Nunn, 2005: 33).



Figure 2. *Detail – Haxey* © Christina Welch 2011.

not exactly a “seething horror of worms and unclean creatures,” but the stomach does appear to be “burst open” (Duffy, 1992: 306).

Beyond my own analysis, I have consulted a forensic pathologist about these carved cadavers, and have had confirmed that the ECCMs have been carved to illustrate a recently deceased person; a fresh rather than a decomposing corpse. Additionally, they medically resemble someone with severe emaciation;⁴ a cause of death most unlikely for those with the funds to commission such an elaborate memorial, for during this period of history both senior clerics and the land-owning classes would have had diets that were in no way frugal (Muldner and Richards, 2005; Lepine, 2010). But as well as these wealthy individuals being represented in a wasted just-dead state, it is notable that their corpses are not resting peaceful. Many of the ECCMs are carved with their heads tipped back slightly and chins tilted upwards thus exposing the neck in an unnatural fashion as detailed below with the ECCM of Thomas Haxey (d. 1492) at York Minster; the first of the single ECCMs and the second oldest in the country (Fig. 2).

ECCMs then are quite peculiar in style. Cohen has noted that whilst they bear some similarity to carved cadavers found in Europe, they also have a distinctly non-Continental feel and this begs the question of their origins. ECCMs typically resemble some of the early French carved *transis*, particularly the single monument of the physician and canon of Laon Cathedral, Guillaume de Harcigny (1310–1393) whose emaciated cadaver, carved lying on a stone slab, is now in the *Musée*

4. Personal conversation with Dr Julia Roberts, October 2011.

de Laon, France, and the tiered monument of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange (c. 1325–1402) whose cadaver, imaged in relief and lying on his burial shroud, currently resides at the *Musée du petit Palais*, Avignon, France (Aberth, 2001; Cohen, 1973). However, while both have a shrunken stomach and therefore do not resemble a corpse of the well-fed elite, neither have the tipped-back head of the ECCMs. However, the memorial tablet for Nicholas Flamel (d. 1418) at the *Musée de Cluny*, Paris, depicts him in the manner of an ECCM; lying naked in a burial shroud, head tipped back, and both hands holding a cloth that covers his groin. Interestingly, de Harcigny covers his groin area with both hands as there is no shroud cloth incorporated in his monument, while de Lagrange, whose left lower arm is now missing, has a burial cloth strategically placed to preserve his modesty, although I suggest it is likely his left hand was placed over the cloth.

In examining other carved *transis* that predate Chichele, (taking Cohen's list as an authoritative if incomplete inventory), it is notable that very few predate Chichele. Apart from the two listed above, there is one other, Francois de la Serra (late 1390s) whose monument is located in the church of La Sarraz, near Lausanne, Switzerland. De la Serra's carved cadaver images a non-emaciated male, head resting on a cushion, with toads covering his face and groin area, and with worms coming from his arms and legs, and thus bears no resemblance to the monument of Chichele. Interestingly, only the ECCM of an un-named male member of the Denston family at St Nicholas's Church in Denston, Suffolk, images a corpse with a rounded belly,⁵ and only 12 of the 35 ECCMs with heads (two are headless) have their cadaver carved with their head resting in a natural position or on some form of support such as a cushion or rolled up mat. With the English known for their own style of carving (Waterman, 1970), it seems evident that whilst there are a small number of carved cadaver monuments in Europe that predate Chichele, their individual influence is not huge for they appear to combine the cadaver representations of de Harcigny (i.e. three-dimensional), de Lagrange (i.e. cadaver with burial shroud across the groin area), and Flamel (overall style of cadaver with tiled head, and strategically positioned shroud cloth). Additionally, none of these three have creepy-crawlies on, or coming out of their bodies, and all are imaged in a naked, emaciated, but not decomposing, state.

The naked emaciated state of the ECCMs is, I suggest, hugely significant, for I argue these monuments acted didactically; being commissioned for the following three reasons. Firstly, to remind the living who saw these monuments to pray for

5. This monument is also interesting as it features a female *transi* although she is enshrouded in her winding cloth with only her face visible, whilst the man who lies beside her conforms to the usual ECCM style of nakedness. Both are well crafted with his including veins in relief on his legs, feet, hands and arms.

the deceased in purgatory. This is evident from wills and family backgrounds of the still named ECCMs which note a concern for lessening their purgatorial stay through the use of chantries, prayers, and almsgiving (see Aberth, 2001; Cohen, 1973; Goodall, 2001; Oosterwijk, 2005). Secondly, they can be understood to demonstrate the humility of the person who commissioned the monument; this can be determined from Matthew 19:24 which states that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven,” and thus by imaging themselves as a poor person in death, the ECCM commissioner could be seen to be humbled in a society that comprehended death as a social leveller.⁶ Thirdly, they act pedagogically as a visual teaching tool to reinforce to the living that they too would be going to purgatory post-mortem, and as such should attend to their soul during their lifetime; this is evident from the previously discussed inscription on Fleming’s monument.⁷

None of the above are in any way controversial but, I assert that suffering in purgatory during this period was understood to be spiritual, and physical during the wet stage of death; the time in which the corpse was rotting away to its eventual skeletal state. Thus the pedagogical aspect of these monuments was enhanced by reminding those who saw these ECCMs that purgatory was a place of severe and painful sufferance where those they loved currently resided, or like themselves, would go after death.

During this period of history, visual means of communicating messages was crucially important as the vast majority of the populace were at most semi-literate in their own language, with very little if any grasp of Latin (the language of the church). Therefore, in actuality the Latin inscription on Fleming’s monument would have had limited effect on those who passed by his monument,⁸ however, because visual imagery was the main means of transmitting important information the actual monument itself spoke volumes, and would have worked with the

6. The earlier visual representations of death such as the common Medieval tales dating from the thirteenth century of the three living/three dead, and from the middle of the fourteenth century, the Dance of Death images informed, “I was as you are, and as I am, you shall be.” In Northern European Medieval society, images of the dead such as these indicated the levelling of society at death by acting as a “pronouncement about the state of the dead” with the *Dance Macabre* imagery demonstrating that from babies to bishops, everyone (apart from the sainted) suffered in purgatory (Aberth, 2001; Oosterwijk, 2004).

7. This also conforms to the didactic *Danse Macabre* representations of death.

8. Fleming founded Lincoln College, Oxford, to combat the teachings of Wycliffe and the Lollards with their push for the inclusion of English in the liturgy, their denial of the Eucharist and indulgences, and their reformist attitude to the afterlife with its associated denial or purgatory. As such Fleming having the inscription in Latin is not unsurprising for, I argue, the didactic message of the monument was powerfully transmitted through visual means in the forms of an ECCM.

theology and doctrine imparted by windows and wall paintings. However, the lack of literacy extended beyond the general public to the clergy; in the Midlands area only 16 per cent of clergy were described in the church records of 1548 as “well learned,” 22 per cent as “learned,” and 12 per cent as “learned a little” (Gill, 2010: 363). This supports the argument made by church historian Peter Heath (1969), that the most educated priests rarely did parish work and that generally parish priests were concerned with liturgical practice and their sacramental role. Further, it adds weight to the notion that moral messages were imparted to parishioners, pilgrims, and priests alike through material culture and especially visual imagery (Jones, 1973: 46).

Given that Medieval churches and cathedrals were highly decorated with stained-glass windows and brightly coloured wall paintings, it is highly likely that the carved cadavers were also painted, although currently all but two are unornamented. There is good evidence for this. The ECCM of John Baret (d. 1463 or 1467) at St Mary’s Church, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, is known to have been painted originally. During conservation by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, flesh tones were located on the cadaver, as was evidence of painted green and red veins (Borges, 2003). The two painted carved cadaver monuments that remain today are painted in plain flesh tones without the addition of veins, but of these only one is thought to be in its original condition, that is the ECCM of Sir Rockley (the only non-fully stone ECCM). This cadaver monument is constructed of oak covered with fine linen, on which flesh coloured paint was applied (Morton, 2009). The condition of the paint on Rockley’s cadaver would indicate that it is of some age and if it is indeed original, then this is remarkable for the monument would have survived the destructive iconoclasm of the Reformation; acts so serious that Elizabeth I issued a proclamation in 1590 (19 September) to stay the defacing and destruction of “Monuments of Antiquite.” Noticeably however, this proclamation did not apply to monuments in metal or stone that “nourish[ed] any kind of superstition” or were “for any religious honour” (Cardwell, 1839: 157–58) and as such would not have applied to the cadaver monuments which were explicitly connected with purgatory. The Reformation in the Worsborough area saw the demise of the local Benedictine priory, Monk Bretton, with the Prior and a few of the monks relocating in the village (Morton u.d.). The Priory was not totally destroyed however, and its collection of books was saved by “various persons [in Worsborough] until 1558 when they were catalogued” (Jayne, 1956: 41). Given this then, it is likely that Worsborough did not suffer greatly under the reforms and as such the ECCM of Rockley could indeed be as originally commissioned; that is without veins.

The other painted ECCM, the monument to Archbishop Chichele, is maintained by the warden and fellows of All Souls College, Oxford, through a bequest



Figure 3. Detail - unnamed male at Church of St Nicholas, Denston (c. 1500) © Christina Welch 2011.

stipulated in the college's foundation (Cohen, 1973: 66). This too is without veins, although it has been repainted a number of times since it was originally commissioned and as such it is impossible to know whether veins were part of the initial design. The Denston ECCM, although now of plain stone, does have clear veins on the arms, legs, hands, and feet, and gives added weight to the notion that many of the ECCMs would have been painted realistically (Fig. 3).

Certainly that most, if not all, the ECCMs were painted in flesh tones is evident from keying marks for gesso (a thin layer of plaster which was then painted) that can be found on all of the ECCMs that are not in a badly deteriorated state. Additionally, some ECCMs have pox marking that stonemasons assure me is redolent of the use of acids such as lime or quicklime, which indicates that something needed to be removed fairly quickly, and given that a small number still have traces of paint on the cadavers, this too adds to the notion that the ECCMs were fully painted to give a just-dead look, regardless of the additional use of painted-on veins.

It is possible that additional adornments on ECCMs included the painting on of creepy-crawlies. The Baret tombs show no evidence for this but two drawings from the anonymous Middle English text, *Disputacione betwyx the Body and Wormes*,



Figure 4. *Detail – Constable’s open torso* © Christina Welch 2011.

depicts two tiered ECCMs, one of a noble man, and one a noble woman, both of which appear to image vermin painted on top of the naked cadavers laid in their winding sheets.⁹ Adding creatures associated with putrefaction in the Medieval mindset, onto the ECCMs, would not only have emphasized the forthcoming horrors of purgatorial physical punishment, but the raised and textured *impasto* would have given a three-dimensional visual effect. Amongst the creatures commonly associated with decay and death were worms, referred to in relation to death in Job (21:26), Isaiah (14:11), and Mark (9:8), and frogs, which feature in Revelation (16:13) in connection with the unclean, death and judgement. Noticeably, Oosterwijk has suggested that in England, fresh corpses were often associated with worms (2005: 55–56), however, apart from the monumental brass of Ralph Hammersley (d. 1519) at St Andrew’s Church, Oddington, Oxfordshire, which depicts a skeletal man in his burial shroud riddled with worms that come from out of his body, no ECCMs of this period feature such decomposition. Indeed, only two ECCMs feature any creatures. What remains of the ECCM of Sir Marmaduke “the little” Constable at St Oswald’s Church, Flamborough, East Yorkshire, appears to contain a toad below an inaccurately sited heart, in his open chest cavity (Fig. 4). Little is known about this ECCM

9. British Library Add. MS37049.



Figures 5 and 6. *Detail – Abbott Wakeman, Tewkesbury Abbey (d. 1549)* © Christina Welch 2011.

beyond a local legend that Sir Marmaduke died after drinking a toad that ate away his heart, but given this cadaver monument is reminiscent of the European monuments, I suggest it may have been erected in memory of his father by his staunchly Catholic son, Robert, as a response to the religious reforms of Henry VIII; Robert was executed for his part in the Pilgrimage of Grace uprising of 1537 (Cross, 2013).

The second ECCM to feature creatures is that of (allegedly)¹⁰ John Wakeman (d. 1549), the last Abbot of Tewkesbury Abbey, Gloucestershire (Fig. 5 and 6). This

10. As previously noted, many of ECCMs have had their name plaques removed and as such several have only been speculatively identified.

ECCM is carved with a mouse or rat (symbols of vermin) on his chest, with one snake crawling across his left leg, and another beside his right; snakes were highly symbolic in the Middle Ages representing the sin which brought death into the world. Further, in his burial shroud, a frog (or toad – another symbol of decay) lurks close to his left ear; left being the side on which Jesus places the damned (non-followers of God) in Matthew (25:33), and as such associated with deficiency. Notably, a Pseudo-Augustine sermon suggests that toads were born from the brain, and serpents from the loins, clearly placing the cadaver creatures further within a Christian context (Oosterwijk, 2005: 53). Interestingly the creatures are on top of the intact corpse rather than emerging from a rotting body, and thus would add to the three-dimensional effect of the memorial. It is therefore likely that the creep-crawlies would have been emphasized in specific colours to highlight the polluted nature of the body, rather than just indicating decomposition.

Vernacular Theology and Purgatory

As noted earlier, there are potent links between ECCMs and purgatorial belief. This is most evident in that the majority of ECCMs date from between 1425 and 1534 (when England was still Catholic), with none built or commissioned between 1537 and 1553 during the reign of the Protestant King Edward VI who abolished purgatory through the Chantries Act (1547) and the Act of Uniformity (1549). Yet when the Catholic Queen Mary came to the throne (1553–1558) and passed the Statue of Repeals Act (1553) which returned the country to Catholicism, four cadaver monuments were commissioned and built.¹¹ Perhaps the most notable of these is that of Bishop Stephen Gardiner (c. 1485–1555), whose ECCM resides in Winchester Cathedral, Hampshire, and who dramatically rose to power during Mary's reign after his Catholic sympathies had led to his expulsion from Edward VI's reformed court. Gardiner's ECCM is not the final one of Mary's reign, however, for both Precentor Thomas Bennett (Salisbury Cathedral) and Bishop Paul Bush (Bristol Cathedral) died in 1558. Whilst Bennett's is fairly typical, of standard design¹² and well carved, Bush in Bristol Cathedral, is a poorly carved ECCM,

11. It is possible that all the ECCMs commissioned during the reign of Edward VI have not survived but given that four of those in existence today date to the brief reign of Mary, this is highly unlikely. They appear to be intimately linked with purgatory and thus it is more likely none were built during 1537–1553. To add weight to this is the 1560 proclamation already noted that exempted stone and metal monuments that were connected to anything superstitious: belief in purgatory would have been classed as superstition.

12. Bennett is carved with his head resting on a rolled rush mat and as such his head is not tipped back exposing the neck. He has a skull carved at his feet and the monument is on a table tomb. His ECCM is very similar in design to that of Archdeacon George Sydenham (d. 1524) which also resides in the cathedral.

noticeably in the torso (where he only has seven sets of ribs) and he does not lie in a burial shroud but is carved naked lying on a mat with his head resting on his mitre (still showing traces of paint). His arms are by his sides and his groin covered by folds of cloth in a loincloth style. Bennett's ECCM was commissioned by him before his death (Pugh and Crittall, 1956) with the date on the monuments stating 1554 placing it firmly within the period of Mary's religious retraditionization. However, Bush died shortly prior to Queen Mary¹³ and although the first Bishop of Bristol, due to his taking a wife during the reign of Edward, Mary deprived him of his status and thus it could be that the monument was a hasty affair carved to avoid the main signifiers of purgatorial punishment, such as the burial shroud, and severe emaciation, but highlight his clerical status; his head rests on his mitre and his staff of office lays on his right side – both retain traces of brightly coloured paint. This ECCM is certainly atypical and its being carved as the Marian Catholic age turns into the Elizabethan Protestant age, with the concomitant abolition of belief in purgatory, is I suggest, significant.

The importance of the belief in purgatory during the Medieval period should not be underestimated. Purgatory effectively provided a safety net at death. Only the sainted went straight to heaven, only those who had committed mortal sins and died unrepentant went directly to hell, whilst the vast majority of people atoned for their earthly sins in purgatory. Purgatory was formally defined in The Council of Lyons (1274) and The Council of Florence (1439) and became an increasingly complex theological issue during the Medieval period. Dramatically illustrated in Dante's *Comedy* (1308–1321),¹⁴ purgatory was understood as a place of severe and painful sufferance where souls gladly accepted their punishments (described in the most physical of terms) in expectance of the resulting unification with God in Heaven (Le Goff, 1981). Time spent in purgatory varied according to one's sins, and certain acts conducted during one's lifetime would give purgatorial remission; a notion dating back to the eleventh century although initially only granted to the living for works that benefited Christendom (such as crusades), and for pilgrimage (Berdero, 1986: 107; Mursell, 2001: 107).

However, by the thirteenth century purgatorial remissions for the dead was an increasingly common understanding, although Papal verification was less clear cut (Shaffern, 1992: 380). Here the living, through their prayers for the dead, could aid the deceased's purgatorial punishment,¹⁵ and further, these good deeds lessened

13. Bush died 11 Oct 1558, and Queen Mary I on 17 Nov 1558.

14. Online edition of Dante's *Comedy* – <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8800/8800-h/8800-h.htm>

15. The value of prayers for the dead can be found in 2 Macc. 12:46, and in Aquinas's section of Suffrages for the Dead in *Summa Theologica* (2008)

their own future post-mortem punishment.¹⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* (c. 1369–1373) provides an example of English church-endorsed lay indulgences based around remissions for the living, while understandings of why such a practice might be popular are evident from the 1422 anonymous *Revelation of Purgatory* where a nun from the Winchester nunnaminster recounts a vision; a fellow nun suffers in purgatory, her skin rent and burning, and fire leaping from her mouth (Risden, 2010); a very sensory and physical description of purgatorial punishment.

Working alongside the notion of purgatorial punishment expressed in sensual terms was the influential vernacular concept of post-mortem sentience. This was the belief that although a corpse was dead, the soul and consciousness had yet to depart the body. In Medieval Northern Europe the boundaries between the living and dead were distinctly blurred; graveyards were social places where business was conducted and lovers met (Bynum, 1998: 591), and as there was no “infallible test for diagnosing when death actually occurred” occasionally people came back to life (Marshall, 2005: 13); as such the tale of the Biblical *Raising of Lazarus* was a Medieval fascination appearing regularly in the Mystery plays of the time (Goodland, 2005).

Further, in Northern Europe the dead and buried were known to return in apparitions as ghosts or revenants: the living dead. Although uncommon, and theologically incorrect, as Medieval historian Nancy Caciola (1996) has argued, these ghost and revenants blurred the line between life and death. Stories of revenants had long been given a theological overlay by the English church and acted as an aid to instruct the living how to avoid such a fearful fate post-mortem. One story relates how Bishop Gilbert Foliot of Hereford (c. 1110–1187) on hearing about a malevolent revenant, suggested that “the Lord had given power to the evil angel of that lost soul to move about in the dead corpse.” He recommended that the grave of the person be opened, holy water sprinkled in and the body be decapitated (Simpson, 2003: 393). The notion that the dead could be punished physically by the living was not unknown. In 897 CE Pope Formosus was put on trial eight months after his death by his successor Stephen VI. Formosus' body was exhumed, dressed in his papal robes, seated on the throne and accused of a number of charges including being unfit for office, of perjury and violating church canons. Although unmoved at the accusation, he was found guilty of the crime, stripped of his papal finery, and had the three fingers which gave papal blessings cut from his left hand, before being given a commoners burial (Kirsch, 2010).

16. As Bynum has noted, during the Medieval period “resurrection and a resurrected body were not necessary in order to see God” for it was understood that “significant events could happen before the end of time” (1985: 282)

Further, during the thirteenth century the inquisition disinterred hundreds of bodies and burned them as standard inquisitorial practice, in fifteenth-century Nuremberg if someone died before their trial, their body was taken to the court in chains where the lawyers would ensure the court helped with their defence, and in 1670 in French national law all suicides and dead prisoners would go before a court. As strange as this may seem to us, in 1591, Pierre Ayrault (1567–1624), a key figure in the development of the French criminal justice system, said “it was no more pointless to condemn the guilty after their death than to posthumously acquit the innocent.” This understanding can be clearly seen in that in the sixteenth century a French outlaw named Raymond Gui, was put on trial before the shrouded bodies of three of his victims; their testimony convicted him and he was executed (Quigley, 1996: 16).

In Medieval England the deceased could stand as witness to the prosecution for their own murder (Oldridge, 2005: 61) and William Shakespeare’s *Richard III* incorporates this understanding, while those who died of self-murder (suicide) needed to have their corpses desecrated in order to ensure they suffered eternally in hell; buried in an unconsecrated plot and without a Christian service: it was important that justice should be seen to be done (Groebner, 2009: 32).¹⁷ The fuzziness between life and death in England was also marked annually in All Souls/All Saints, where the ringing of church bells comforted the departed in purgatory (Hutton, 1994: 45), and where masses for the dead helped the living in a culture which popularly believed that souls lingered in the vicinity of their graves for up to a year during the most dangerous period of decomposition (Marshall, 2002: 14); a time that, using the terminology of Anthropologist Robert Hertz, can be labelled the wet stage of death.

In 1960, Hertz published a seminal paper on mortuary rituals in the Pacific region. Here he identified the transition between the wet medium of the body (the corpse) which removes the dead person from daily social life, and the dry medium (the bony remains) which places the individual into the supernatural world of their ancestors (Hertz, 2004). Hertz’s theory is directly applicable to Medieval England, as during this wet stage of death the deceased can be described as being in a liminal state; a state betwixt and between, where the person is neither fully alive nor fully dead. This stage has been noted by Caciola, who states that during the Medieval period, for Northern Europeans, only when the body was

17. Indeed, such was the fear that suicides would rise from the grave, that corpses were often buried at crossroads so the ghost would be geographically confused. Further, as it was common to fear that all those who suffered a bad death (not a home with family and fully confessed) could come back from the dead, thrust the bodies of criminals, or those who had died a violent death, were often placed in the grave face-down (Groebner, 2009).

fully skeletal was it “fully defunct,” only then did the “psychic death and physical death” coincide (1996: 33). Further, medical historian Katherine Park has argued that it was common for the Medieval flesh-and-blood-body to be integral to the self, with corpses during what Hertz would describe as the wet stage of death thought to be “active, sensitive, or semi-animate, possessed of a gradually fading life” (1994: 115, 119). Such selfhood could persist for more than a year after burial; a not unsurprising belief given that exposure to rotting corpses would not have been infrequent, for Medieval graves were not deep, coffins still relatively rare (Litten, 1991: 71) and urban cemeteries so crowded that intercutting was common (Hadley, 2001: 118). Notably, Park asserts that “belief in the continued animation of the corpse could be found at all levels of society and culture [and] was analysed, debated, and defended, with copious erudite references, by learned northern writers on theology, medicine, and law” (1994: 117).

Given that the Medieval mindset required “abstract thoughts...[to] be clothed in words or images to achieve actuality” (Dante in Olson, 2006: 99), although theologically post-mortem sentience was incorrect, it would be of benefit to present an ECCM as a naked, emaciated and in-a-state-of-discomfort corpse. ECCMs, I argue, acted a powerful pedagogical symbol that reinforced the horrors and physical pains of purgatory reminding onlookers to attend to their own post-mortem fate, and to pray for the person displayed before them. If one had the money, then commissioning an ECCM not only ensured you were in people’s prayers on a regular basis thus lessening your own purgatorial punishments, but by encouraging prayers from others, ensured the pray-er also benefited from reducing their own afterlife suffering.

Cohen, however, would disagree with my thesis. She has argued that the essential purpose of a *transi* was an “expressed of hope for the salvation of the deceased...which was of concern to the dead not the living” (1973: 4). Thus, she states, those who commissioned their *transi* tombs would have needed to shift their orientation from salvation for their own soul, to the edification of those looking upon the image of their cadaver if these memorials were pedagogical in nature. However, if we take the designation found on the ECCM of Dean Thomas Heywood (d. 1492) at Lichfield Cathedral, Staffordshire, it is clearly didactic as well as petitioning, for it reads “pray for me I beseech you, I am what you will be, and I was what you are.” Imaging the corpse in a just-dead emaciated state would then ensure that the physical punishments of purgatory, in the wet stage of death, were visually evident to those looking at the ECCM. Thus, these monuments can be understood as both a reflection of the concern the commissioner of the monument had for own soul, as well as a concern for the souls of those of saw the image of their emaciated cadaver.

ECCMs Explored

Having suggested that ECCMs were essentially pedagogical and related to physical purgatorial punishment, I wish to contextualize the surviving ECCMs. There are 37 known ECCMs currently in existence in England: 21 are clerical; one is headless so designation is impossible; and of the remaining 15 non-clerical only one is of a female, Alice de la Pole at the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Ewelme, Oxfordshire. Ten monuments are tiered showing both an effigy of the individual in life (and at resurrection) as well as in their naked cadaverous state; although one, that of Dean Heywood, is known to have originally been tiered but the effigy destroyed. Of the ten remaining tiered ECCMs, five are clerical: Archbishop Henry Chichele (d. 1425) at Canterbury Cathedral; Archbishop Richard Fleming (d. 1430) at Lincoln Cathedral, Lincolnshire; Archdeacon William Sponne (d. 1448) at St Lawrence's Church, Towcester, Northamptonshire (whose upper effigy is part wooden); Bishop Thomas Bekington (d. 1450–1451) at Wells cathedral, Somerset; and Dr Hugh Ashton, Archdeacon of York (d. 1522) at St John's College Chapel, Cambridge. The other five tiered ECCMs were members of the social elite: Sir John Fitzalan (d. 1435, 14th Earl of Arundel, 4th Baron Maltravers) at the Fitzalan chapel in Arundel Castle, West Sussex; John Golafre (d. 1442, court squire to Richard II, sheriff of Berkshire and Oxfordshire, Knight of the Shire [MP] for Oxfordshire) at the Church of St Nicholas, Fyfield, Berkshire; Alice de la Pole mentioned above (d. 1476, granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer, Lady of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, protector of Margaret de Anjou); Sir Henry Willoughby at the Church of St Leonards, Wollaton, Nottinghamshire (d. 1528, knight to both Henry VII and Henry VIII); and Sir Roger Rockley in St Mary's Church, Worsborough, South Yorkshire (d. 1522 or 1533 – the date is unclear).

The other 27 ECCMs are all single figures, with eight being now anonymous. The unidentified ECCM at the Church of St James in Dursley, Gloucestershire, is headless and as such it is impossible to know if he was a cleric or member of the landed-gentry, but a further two appear to be clerical as they have a tonsured haircut; that is a shaven patch on the crown of the head – one is located at the church of St John the Baptist with St Andrew and St Boniface in Paignton, Devon, and the other at Southwark Cathedral, London, where it is likely that he was one of the head abbots. A tonsured haircut indicated a renunciation of worldly goods, but neither Archdeacon Sponne, at Towcester, nor Sir William Weston, Knight of St John (d. 1541) at the Priory Church of the Order of St John, Clerkenwell, London, have this hairstyle. Additionally, due to the very poor condition of the ECCM of Bishop John Alcock (d. 1500) at Ely Cathedral, Cambridgeshire, it is difficult to state whether the detached head is wearing a crown or the remains of a mitre. Either is most unusual as other bishops memorialized in ECCMs either have their

head resting on their mitre like a pillow, or have their heads tucked inside their knotted burial shroud. The Ely ECCM is in very poor condition and unless conservation work is carried out imminently, it may be beyond saving.

The remaining five anonymous ECCMs (untensured so likely members of the social elite) include the Denston male (c. 15C), but the remaining four can be found at the Church of St Mary's in Hemingborough, North Yorkshire; St Andrew's Church in Feniton, Devon; the Church of St John the Baptist in Frome, Somerset; and the church of St Mary's in Stalbridge, Dorset (Fig. 7 and 8). This last ECCM is unusual for although the carving implies a male with no breasts (Alice's ECCM has withered breasts), it is located beneath a Medieval wall painting depicting a naked emaciated corpse in a burial shroud, bearing the following text:



Figures 7 and 8. Detail – Stalbridge wall painting and anonymous ECCM © Christina Welch 2011.

She that lies here, and rests within this tomb, had Rachel's face, and Leah's fruitful womb, Abigail's wisdom, Lydia's faithful heart, with Martha's care, and Mary's better part.

It is possible that the image and text relates to a female memorialized without an ECCM (as with Flamel), but that Victorian alterations to the church in 1868 placed the ECCM close to this misleading wall painting. That ECCMs have survived the wanton damage of the Reformation and the English Civil War, as well as numerous church restorations is itself impressive.

The other 19 single ECCMs are all named, but only five are of the social elite: Sir Meverill Samson (d. 1462) at the Church of John the Baptist, Tideswell, Derbyshire; John Baret at Bury St Edmunds (d. 1463 or 67); John Barton (d. 1491) at the Church of St Giles in Holme-by-Newark, Nottinghamshire; Sir Marmaduke Constable at Flamborough (d. 1530); and Richard Willoughby (d. 1471) at St Leonards, Wollaton, uncle to Sir Henry Willoughby whose ECCM was mentioned previously. As noted there are two ECCMs at Wollaton parish church, with the one attributed to Sir Henry being a tiered monument, while the single cadaver is attributed to Richard (Fig. 9). However, although the alleged ECCM of Richard is in poorer condition than Henry's and thus appears to be the older of the two, this ECCM is in fact a more appropriate fit for the tiered monument of Sir Henry. The ECCM attributed to Sir Henry has had the top and bottom knots removed from



Figure 9. Detail – ECCM attributed to Richard Willoughby, Wollaton © Christina Welch 2011.



Figure 10. *Detail – Barton, St Giles Church, Holme (d. 1491)* © Christina Welch 2011.

the carved winding sheet in which he lies in order to fit this cadaver into the windowed tomb chest where it is visible through trace-work. It is known that much work was carried out on the church in the mid-Victorian period¹⁸ and I strongly suggest that during this time these ECCMs were switched; the one deemed the oldest due to its poor condition, attributed to Richard despite being noticeably too short for the recess in which it lies.

The remaining 14 single named ECCMs are all clerical: Dean Thomas Haxey (d. 1425) at York Minster, Yorkshire; John Careway (d. 1443), Church of St Vigor, Fulbourn, Cambridge; Bishop John Carpenter (d. 1476) at Holy Trinity Church, Westbury, Bristol; Heywood at Lichfield (d. 1492); Alcock at Ely (d. 1500); Precentor William Sylke (d. 1508) at Exeter Cathedral, Devon; Archdeacon George Sydenham (d. 1524) at Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire; Bishop Richard Fox (d. 1528) at Winchester Cathedral, Hampshire; Canon William Parkhouse (d. 1540) at Exeter Cathedral, Devon; Weston at Clarkenwell (d. 1541); Wakeman at Tewkesbury (d. 1549); Gardiner at Winchester (d. 1555); Precentor Thomas Bennett (d. 1558) at Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire; plus that of Bishop Paul Bush (d. 1558) in Bristol Cathedral which as noted is not anatomically correct. Barton at Holme-by-Newark (Fig. 10), and the anonymous Stalbridge ECCM, are also not anatomically accurate as all three have an incorrect number of ribs, although in other respects they are a good impression of the human form. The Barton ECCM is also interesting in that it is noticeably smaller than the male figure that forms part of the double effigy lying above the cadaver. Sylke's ECCM in Exeter is also of an unusually small size

18. *St Leonards' History* – undated web page <http://www.stleonardswollaton.org.uk/history.html>

although the carving bears notable similarities to those on the Kirkham chapel at the Paignton parish church. It is likely that the two noticeably smaller in size are due to artist style and these ECCMs being symbolic rather than realistic, for as noted, the others are all life size and indeed some replicate the actual height of the individual memorialized.

Conclusion

In conclusion, having examined all known ECCMs it is clear that to describe them as emaciated corpses with protruding intestines, or as rotting corpses covered with creepy-crawlies is incorrect. It would seem that originally they were most likely painted in flesh tones to give a just-dead look, with some having the addition of painted-on veins. Some may too have had creatures associated with decay crawling over the body, possibly using paint or *impasto* to demonstrate in two-dimensions what the Tewkesbury ECCM does in three-dimensions. This would accord with the images found in *Disputacione*, and the words that originally accompanied Fleming's monument in Lincoln cathedral concerning a body in the very early stages of decomposition (the wet stage of death).

Given the evidence of belief in post-mortem sentience, it is, I argue, probable that the ECCMs functioned to portray that a body in the wet stage of death suffered physically in purgatory with Medieval vernacular theology, tales of revenants, and legal precedent of the time, supporting this notion. Given that the religious and social elite would have been well versed in their spiritual duty to educate the less-literate in theology (orthodox Catholic, and English vernacular), to display their corpse as naked and emaciated (and thus humbled in death), would have been a useful social pedagogical tool benefiting both the deceased being prayed for, and the pray-er in terms of lessening purgatorial punishments.

That ECCMs were potently connected to purgatorial belief is clearly evident. They appear in late-Medieval Catholic England, were not commissioned during the Protestant reign of Edward VI, but were restarted during Mary's brief Catholic resurgence, disappearing totally when Protestantism once more took hold of England. Indeed, the ECCM of Bush who died on the cusp of these changes seems to indicate the change in symbolism of these unusual memorials. Thus, whilst we may not know quite why the English fashion for this originally European style of death memorial began, we know that the Reformation was their death nail. Given that only 37 of these memorials exist today and that we have no definitive information on how they originally looked and functioned, drawing on contemporary sources (artistic, theological, medical and vernacular) is one way that ECCMs can be brought back to life. From my fieldwork, it is clear that these memorials are

largely neglected and misunderstood, and further research could shed light on the brief fashion for naked, emaciated corpses to be commissioned by the late-Medieval social and religious elite.

References

- Alberth, J. 2001. *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*. New York: Routledge.
- Aquinas, T. 2008 [1920]. "Suffrage for the Dead," *Summa Theologica* online edition <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5071.htm#article2> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Borges, V. 2003. "Conservation of an English Cadaver Tomb," *V&A Conservation*, 45, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-45/conservation-of-an-english-cadaver-tomb/> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Bredero, A. H. 1986. *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages*. Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans.
- Bynum, C. W. 1995. *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christinity, 200-1336*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1998. "Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 142.4, 589–96.
- Caciola, N. 1996. "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture," *Past & Present*, 152.1, 3–45.
- Cardwell, E. 1830. *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, K. 1973. *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. California: University Press.
- Cross, C. 2013. "Participants in the Pilgrimage of Grace (act. 1536–1537)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95587> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Duffy, E. 1992. *Stripping the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gill, S. 2010. "Managing Change in the English Reformation: The 1548 Dissolution of the Chantries and Clergy of the Midlands Country Surveys." University of Birmingham PhD thesis. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/1109/1/Gill10PhD.pdf> (accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Goodall, J. A. A. 2001. *God's House at Ewelme: Devotion and Architecture at a Fifteenth-century Almshouse*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Goodland, K. 2005. *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate.
- Groeblner, V. 2009. *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*. New York: Zone Books.
- Hadley, D. M. 2001. *Death in Medieval England*. Stroud: Tempus.
- Heath, P. 1969. *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hertz, R. 2004. "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," in A. C. G. M. Robben, ed., *Death, Mourning and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 197–212.
- Hutton, R. 1994. *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700*. Oxford: Open University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203636.001.0001>
- Jayne, S. 1956. *Catalogue of the English Renaissance*. Berkley: University of California Press.

- Jones, W. R. 1973. "Lollards and Images: The Defence of Religious Arts in Later Medieval Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34.11, 27–50. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2708942>
- Kirsch, J. P. 2010. "Pope Formosus," http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Pope_Formosus (last accessed 15 April, 13).
- Le Goff, J. 1981. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lepine, D. 2010. " 'High Solemn Ceremonies'; The Funerary Practice of the Late Medieval English Higher Clergy," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61.1, 18–39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991357>
- Litten, J. 1991. *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral since 1450*. London: Robert Hale.
- Marshall, P. 2005. *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*. Oxford: Open University Press.
- Morton, W. 2009. "St Mary's Church, Worsborough," <http://www.barnsleyfhs.co.uk/wboro2.html> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Morton, W. u.d. "Worsborough," <http://www.barnsleyfhs.co.uk/wboro1.html> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Muldner, G., and M. P. Richards. 2005. "Fast or Feast: Reconstructing Diet in Later Medieval England by Stable isotope Analysis," *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 32, 39–48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2004.05.007>
- Mursell, G. 2001. *English Spirituality: From the Earliest Time to 1700*. London: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Nunn, H. M. 2005. *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Oldridge, D. 2005. *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters*. Bodmin: MPG Books.
- Olson, T. 2006. "The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficence of Pain: 1100–1450," *Journal of Religion and Law*, 22.1, 63–129.
- Oosterwijk, S. 2004. "Of Corpses, Constables and Kings: The Danse Macabre in Late- Medieval and Renaissance Culture," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 157, 61–90. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/006812804799451385>
- 2005. "Food for Worms – Food for Thought," *Church Monuments*, 20, 40–80.
- 2006. "Kadavers, wormen, padden en dubbeldekkers Transi-monumenten in Noord-Europa." *Madoc*. Jaargang, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_mad001200601_01/_mad001200601_01_0026.php (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Park, K. 1994. "The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47.1, 1–33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2863109>
- Pugh, R. B., and E. Crittall. 1956. "The Cathedral of Salisbury: From the Reformation to the Restoration," in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 3* (1956), 183–97. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40265> (last accessed 15 April, 2013).
- Quigley, C. 1996. *The Corpse: A History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Risden, E. L. 2010. " 'A Revelation of Purgatory' and Chaucer's The Prioress," in *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 35. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 105–11.
- Shaffern, R. W. 1992. "Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages," *Church History*, 61, 367–81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3167791>
- Simpson, J. 2003. "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England," *Folklore*, 114.3, 389–402. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587032000145397>
- Waterman, D. M. 1970. "Somerset and Other Foreign Building Stone in Medieval Ireland, c1175–1400," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 33, 63–75.